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The Mythopoetic Maori

His Genius for Personification as seen in his Mythological Concepts

Na

Ira-tahu raua ko Hine-kura.

Elsdon Best alias Ira-tahi

Hine-kura = wife of above.

With compliments

Elsdon Best

THE
MYTHOPOETIC MAORI

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NA
IRA-TAHU RAUA KO HINE-KURA

NEW PLYMOUTH, N.Z.:
THOMAS AVERY, PRINTER, BINDER, BOOKSELLER AND
MANUFACTURING STATIONER
1922

THE MYTHOPOETIC MAORI

HIS GENIUS FOR PERSONIFICATION AS SEEN IN HIS MYTHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS.

Na Ira-tahu raua ko Hine-kura.

"Nature is the organ through which the Universal Spirit speaks to the individual."

—*Emerson.*

IN Wordsworth we recognise the enthusiastic nature lover, one phase of whose mentality resembles that of the neolithic Maori. The old Field Wanderer, however, felt certain influences that were not recognised by the Maori. His was the receptive mind that not only appreciates the beauties of Nature, but also feels their influence upon the spiritual and moral nature of man, the man endowed with a receptive mind. Hence the following lines:—

"One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach us more of man
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can."

It is not given to many to understand these subtle teachings of Nature, to appreciate a moral influence as emanating from the old Earth Mother, to read the lessons contained in the beauties and majesty of Nature. Those who are affected by such beauties, whose minds are thrilled by the majesty of Hine-maunga, the diverse moods of Hine-moana, and the glories of the Dawn Maid, who hear the silent song

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of the old Earth Mother and her offspring, it is they who ever list to that song in the hour of heart sadness, and who know full well the truth of Longfellow's lines:—

> "Such songs have power to quiet
> The restless pulse of care,
> And come like benediction
> That follows after prayer."

The Maori of yore may not have recognised directly such influences, but that he was impressed by his ceaseless observation of natural phenomena and their beauties, there is clear evidence. That evidence is found in his mythopoetic creations, as in his personification of the dawn in Hine-titama, the fair Dawn Maid, whose loveliness is described in glowing terms. Haply there existed in his mind a subconscious idea that beauty and goodness should be allied, perchance he was unconsciously affected by the influence mentioned above. How else would he evolve the idea of transforming the Dawn Maid into the champion and protector of the spiritual life of man, under whose aegis the human soul finds peace in the spirit world. For she it is who protects the soul of man from dread Whiro, she it is who ever stands between the spirits of the dead and the powers of darkness and evil.

The cosmogonic myths of the Maori contain an element of deep interest. There are two aspects of such myths, one of which is much more widely known than the other. The better known version is preserved in the form of a genealogy, wherein, from primal Chaos, the universe was evolved through the agency of many succeeding generations, including those termed Nothingness, Darkness, Seeking, Conception, Desire, Thought, Mind, Knowledge, Form, Possession, &c. Then Rangi and Papa, the Sky Father and Earth Mother, came into being, and, from the union of this pair, sprang all things on earth, and many that are not of this world.

The other version represents the inner teachings of yore, and in it we see that the heavens and earth were brought into being by Io the Supreme Being, Io of the twelve names, including those of Io the Parent, Io the Parentless, and Io of the Hidden Face.

The offspring of the primal parents, Rangi and Papa, were three score and ten, all of whom were of the male sex, and all were *atua*, supernatural beings. Among them were Uru-te-ngangana, Rongo, Whiro, Tawhirimatea, Punaweko, and Tane. From Uru, the Gleaming One, came the Whanau Marama, the Shining Ones, the Children of Light who ever adorn the breast of the Sky Parent. In Rongo we have a being who represents the moon, and who, in conjunction with Tane, guards the field of the husbandman and causes crops to flourish. Whiro personifies Darkness, Evil, and Death, while Tawhirimatea represents the winds of space. Punaweko personifies land-birds, and Tane personifies the red sun.

When the Sky Father and Earth Mother were separated by their offspring, deep grief assailed them, and ever do they mourn for each other. Even so when dew and rain descend from the heavens upon the body of the Earth Mother, we know that Rangi is weeping for his lost love. It is Te Ihorangi (personified form of rain) who brings this token of affection to Papa the Parentless. When we see the white form of Hine-pukohu, the Mist Maid, slowly ascending, gliding up the lofty frontlet of Hinemaunga, the Mountain Maid, we know that the Earth Mother is sending forth her token of love to Rangi, the companion of her long gone youth.

Now it was resolved by the primal offspring to people the earth, to bring Man into the world. At that time no life existed save the *ira atua* (supernormal life, life as known to gods), the *ira tangata* (human life, mortal life) was unknown in the world. Thus the thought grew—the female element must be sought. But all the female denizens of the twelve bespaced heavens were supernatural beings, they

could not produce the *ira tangata*. Now Tane went forth to seek the female element, Tane the Fertilizer, he who brings warmth to the body of the Earth Mother. He mated with Hine-maunga, the Mountain Maid (personified form of mountains and ranges), who brought forth Para-whenua (personified form of the waters of earth), who was taken to wife by Rakahore (personified form of rock) and gave birth to Hine-one, the Sand Maid, and to Hine-tu-a-kirikiri, the Gravel Maid, of whom it is said, "*He ope na Hine-tu-a-kirikiri e kore e taea te tatau*"—A troop of the Gravel Maid cannot be numbered.

Tane persisted in his quest, and so mated with many female beings, who produced the various species of trees seen in the Great Forest of Tane that flourishes on the body of the universal Mother. It was now seen that no female being existed that could give birth to man, hence the brethren resolved to create woman. To Tane the Fertilizer was the task assigned. So Tane fashioned from a portion of the body of the Earth Mother an image in human form. In this lifeless form he implanted the soul and breath of life obtained from Io the Supreme Being, and then that lifeless image became vivified, it opened its eyes, looked upon the World of Life, and arose—a Woman. The great quest for the female element was over, Woman had entered the world.

This first woman was known as Hine-ahu-one, the Earth Formed Maid. She was the first being of the *ira tangata*, and the mother of mankind. She was taken to wife by Tane, and to them was born Hine-titama, the fair one, she who separates Night from Day, she whose beauty has been a loved theme even to our own time—Hine-titama is the Dawn Maid.

Tane now sought to take Hine-titama to wife, but she fled from him. To the far west she fled, pursued by Tane, and, at the edge of the world, she turned and bade Tane return—"Return, O Tane, and bring our children forth to the world of light; I will descend to the underworld, there to receive our

children and protect their spiritual welfare." And, even so, down the changing ages to the present day, has the erst Dawn Maid abode in Rarohenga, the subterranean spirit world, and protected the souls of men from dread Whiro and his myrmidons. Ever does Tane beget fair dawn maids who fare westward and descend to Rarohenga, to be cherished and guarded by Hine-titama.

The dread Whiro is ever hostile to man. Long was the strife between Tane and Whiro, wherein we see the old Persian concept of the contest between Light and Darkness. After a long struggle Whiro was defeated and driven down to the underworld, but ever he assails man, the descendants of Tane. Ever Whiro and the Maiki brethren (personified forms of disease) attack man in the world of life, and slay him in countless thousands. In Tai-whetuki, the House of Death, they ever dwell.

In his daily journey Tane moves westward, and every night he spends in the underworld, the mysterious region known as the Hidden Home of Tane. With every morn he reappears, heralded by a newly born Dawn Maid, who retires before him as he passes over the vast region of Mahora-nui-atea, the rolling plaza of Hine-moana, the Ocean Maid. But, when he reaches the far off realm of Irihia, when he is suspended over the Bounds of Night, Tane-te-waiora lays down the Golden Way across the heaving breast of the Ocean Maid. This is the Ara whanui a Tane, the Broad Path of Tane, by which the souls of the dead leave this world and pass to the spirit world. It is the last office performed by Tane for his offspring, it is the gleaming sun-glade, the golden path of the setting sun.

When man succumbs to the evil powers of Whiro, and his released soul fares forth upon the Golden Way, then men of the world of life quote a saying as old as the days of Hine-titama and the Earth Formed Maid :—"*He mata mahora no te Ara whanui a Tane.*"

* * * *

The ocean is personified in Hine-moana, the Sea Maid, who ever assails the old Earth Mother; her restless legions, in serried ranks, in ordered array, ever roll in from Mahora-nui-atea to attack Papa the Parentless. The bays, gulfs, inlets, seen by us in the flanks of Terra Mater are the work of Hine-moana. Yet others defend the old Mother from the rolling battalions of the Ocean Maid. For gaunt Rakahore (personified form of rock), with Hine-one, the Sand Maid, and Hine-tu-a-kirikiri, the Gravel Maid, ever assemble to protect her. When the Storm Fiends are abroad they render brave service. When Tawhirimatea (personified form of wind) and the whole of the Whanau-puhi (Wind Children) troop forth on the vast plaza of the Ocean Maid; when Hine-whaitiri, the Thunder Maid, is heard in the quivering heavens; when Tupai (male personification of lightning) and Hine-te-uira, the Lightning Maid, stab the gloom laden realm of Watea (Space) with flashing lances—then it is that the children of the grey old Earth Mother stand by her to protect her.

Towering above the lands she holds in trust for mankind, looms Hine-maunga, the Mountain Maid. Around her massive shoulders the Whanau-kapua, the Cloud Children, are hovering, while Hine-pukohu, the Mist Maid, enwraps her with fleecy veil. High up on her stern brow the gleam of the Rua-koha (summer lightning) is seen, that, with the booming of Ēpa (thunder storm personified) and Hine-whaitiri, send warning omens to mankind. The advent of Hine-takurua, the Winter Maid (personified form of winter), tells of the coming of Tioroa (personification of ice, &c.), and when the drifting snow is seen the folk of this world say:—"*Ka rere nga purapura a Matariki*"—Matariki (the Pleiades) is sowing his seed. And though the awesome clamour of the Thunder Maid may affright some, yet comfort is found in yet another old time aphorism:—"*Whaitiri-papa, he tangata waha huka*"—Her fierce clamour is, but as the wild talk of a frothy-mouthed person, and harmless withal.

The green robes of the Mountain Maid are the offspring of Tane, the trees he brought into the world, and his daughter Hine-rau-wharangi represents growth in the vegetable world. Within those green forests dwell the Heketoro, the fairy folk, by the murmuring brooks of Parawhenua. The Mountain Maid looks westward over the lonely sea, and eastward over far spread leagues of verdant forest. She sees the coming of Hina-keha, Pale Hina of the silvery light, as she returns bright and beautiful from the Life Giving Waters of Tane. She sees Kahukura, the rainbow, bestriding the heavens, and looks down on fair lands formed by herself in long past ages.

* * * * *

In the following lines Hine-maunga, the Mountain Maid, as represented by Taranaki, or Mount Egmont, appears as the guardian of those fair lands at her feet until man shall come to utilise them. She sees the coming of Kupe, and of Manaia, the courageous old Polynesian voyagers who laid down the *ara moana*, or sea roads, across the restless breast of Hine-moana. The Service Song of the Mountain Maid is a very old one, but it is not given to all mankind to hear it. It illustrates a quaint concept that comes down to us from the childhood of the human race; it is a survival from the Mythopoetic Age.

* * * *

HE MIHI KI A HINE-MAUNGA.

A GREETING TO THE MOUNTAIN MAID AND HER SERVICE SONG TO MANKIND.

"I gaze across a fair, tamed land,
Across the verdant lea,
Where eastward look you to the dawn,
And westward to the sea.

I feel your lifeless forces,
I hear your silent speech,
That wise men told in days of old ;
Quaint lore the gods did teach.

O ! Brave old Taranaki,
Old Mountain strong and wise ;
O ! Green clad Hine-maunga
Give sight to sightless eyes.

(And lo ! I heard a wordless lay
Echo the world along,
And green robed Hine-maunga sang
To me her Service Song.

I heard her wondrous voice afar
Make clear the Hidden Law,
And then I heard the things I heard
And saw the things I saw.)

I saw your rifted sides aglare, I heard your thunders roar ;
I saw your flaming ire leap forth, your reddened life blood pour ;
I saw a bare and lifeless land win slowly back to life ;
What time brave Tane's children come to hide the signs of strife.

Old Mother Earth hath bred you for service true and long ;
The Parent Sky hath led you to duties bold and strong;
Calm, steadfast, ever faithful, changeless through changing years ;
You held your post undaunted, you knew not weakling fears.

And when, from Tane's fell pursuit, the Dawn Maid's flight began ;
You saw afar the Golden Path that guides the soul of man ;
Yea, o'er the sun glade's gleaming track you saw their spirits-fare ;
To where, in Tane's hidden realm, they seek the Dawn Maid's care.

You saw the silent forests, you saw the ripening soil ;
You held in bond the unknown fruits that wait on human toil ;
You saw the age old ranges, you saw the sailless sea ;
You held the virgin lands in trust from all eternity ;
When, westward to the hissing seas, your red ejecta ran ;
You flung the rolling plains afar, fair heritage to man.

The Sea Maid's restless legions assail your flanks in vain ;
The Wind God's rude battalions wheel baffled o'er the plain.
The Storm Fiends flout and lash you, and sullenly retire ;
And fierce Tupai rends you with dart and scathing fire.
Anon hoarse Whaitiri booms forth whatever fate befalls,
While from your stern uplifted head the Rua-koha calls.

Bright Kahukura tells you of Epa's warning drums
And Tioroa enshrouds you when Takurua comes.
Around your riven shoulders the wan Cloud Children bide ;
The Mist Maid hovers lightly athwart your rugged side.
Unto your comely breast on high fair Hine-rau doth cling ;
Throughout your virgin robes of green, sweet Puna-weko sings.

Adown your sturdy loins apace swift Parawhenua glides ;
Through boscage green and sylvan scene where Heketoro hides.
Gaunt Rakahore guards your feet hard by the swarthy strand ;
Where Hine-one's smoothly form reclines in ribbed sea-sand.

The beams of Hina meet you athwart a lonely scene.
The rays of Tane greet you across the forest green.

The Shinings Ones who gleam above your snowy mantle rare,
They tell us yet of mystic gods, of Terra Mater's care;
And far above your cloud wrapt head, where falls the gentle dew,
Te Ihorangi brings the tears the Father shed for you.

Down through the changing ages your faithful service grew;
Onward through countless æons loyal you were and true;
Until across the pathless seas where palm clad islets lie;
You saw bold Kupe's seaworn craft break through the hanging sky.
You saw Manaia's fearless band, dark hued by blood and sun,
You saw the Mist Land's lonely shores by stalwart rovers won.

But O! the Questing Mind that lists your wordless Service Hymn;
That speaks to us in silent tones of vigils long and grim;
Of vigils brave, of vigils kept ere yet the gods had birth,
And ere the rolling sun above rolled round the rolling earth.

So let me strive to hold my task,
Ere yet the lessons fade,
We owe to Hine-maunga.
The steadfast Mountain Maid.
Sing me, O Hine-maunga!
Your wondrous Service Song,
That I too may be faithful,
That I too may be strong."

* * * *

It is a very remarkable fact that man in the culture stage of the Maori should possess a more poetic mind than does civilized man. And yet it is so. Yet the openly expressed admiration for a fair scene, as heard among us, is unknown to the Maori. He will not speak directly of such matters. His mythopoetic mentality urges him to introduce personifications, to indulge in metaphysical abstractions and allegorical fancies. Who has ever heard a genuine Maori admire in plain language the beauties of the dawn, and yet those beauties were not hidden from him, nor were they unappreciated by him. He simply followed the promptings of his own mind, he personified the dawn, and so describes, in glowing terms, the beauties of fair Hine-titama, the Dawn Maid. The following description of her, given by an old native many years ago, bears out the above remark :—"This is Hine-nui-te-po, she who was known as Hine-titama ere she descended to the underworld. Truly she was a woman of surpassing beauty. Her eyes were like unto the clear flame of a glowing fire, and her form was of great beauty. Her body gleamed with a ruby hue, her skin was smooth as the *karengo* seaweed, her face was like a summer day, calm and beautiful, and her breast was like unto the placid ocean that glows at sunset in the eighth moon. When she came forth from her abode bright beyond compare was the light of her eyes. When she disrobed and went forth to bathe, verily her skin resembled the breast of the beautiful *koroirangi* bird, and the shimmering beauty of Parearohi (personification of the quivering of heated air in summer). Her limbs were as though carefully fashioned by the hand of man, and her beautiful hair charmed the observer. Thus it was that, when the men of yore beheld a woman of great beauty, they quoted an old time saying of the Maori folk :—'*Ko Hine-titama koe, matawai ana te whatu i te tirohanga.*' (You are like Hine-titama, the eye glistens when gazing upon you.) Her bathing place was Wai-mahuru ; her dwelling place was Wharau-

rangi ; her village home was Te Rua-tuwhenua ; her plaza was the Tatau o te po (the underworld)."

Here we see how the Maori appreciated the beauties of the dawn, and how he spoke of them out of his mythopoetic mentality. The English rendering is crude, but the original is a poem in prose. And this fell from the lips of barbaric man, your cannibal savage, at whom we ever look askance.

* * * *

In the following brief sketch of the beauties of dawn we have the Pakeha (European) point of view, but containing Maori personifications, as rendered by one who appreciates both styles. The mind of this young student has grasped the concepts of neolithic man, and the two minds meet on the common ground termed love of Nature.

A Glorious Sunrise.

Saturday, 25th June, 1921.

" Hine-Maunga, the Mountain Maid, looms coldly against the eastern horizon, while Hine Kapua, the Cloud Maid, in sombre black, hovers above, and guards the portals of the Hidden Home of Tane. Hine Titama, the glorious Dawn Maid, now appears as she flies from her ruddy sire. The Cloud Maid is suffused with dull gold, which slowly fades away, leaving her in sombre black as before ; then one crimson splash pierces her gloomy form, another, and yet another, until a brilliant crimson spreads over and partially obscures the background. Her robes are now a blazing crimson with touches of black showing through ; the contrast being most striking and beautiful. Away to the east, one of the Cloud Children, in black and crimson, rests against the blue green breast of Rangi, the Sky Parent, and stretching far away to the south is a host of Cloud Children in soft pink resting against the rose-pink of the heavens. Yet again, to the north-west of the

Cloud Maid, a host of her fair young kin, in shimmering fleecy white, rests against the deep azure of Rangi, as Venus in the north still gazes calmly down upon the beautiful scene. Hina Keha towards the west is also shining down on Papa, the Earth Mother. Brave Tane now leaps forth in all his dazzling glory, while across the rippling waters of Hine Moana, the Ocean Maid, the shadows of the Whanau Kapua are sweeping.

So enthralled is the observer when witnessing such a scene, that one seems to be a part of it all, and the feeling experienced is one of intense pleasure tinged with feelings of sadness."

* * * *

Remains but to greet the Mountain Maid, the Mist Maid, the Dawn Maid and Ocean Maid, with all their brave array of sisters, who are passing away from the World of Light to the gloom of oblivion. There will they foregather with the Cloud Children, the Wind Children, and the Children of Light, fair offspring of the primal parents Rangi and Papa. They shall pass through the fragile *rau wharangi*, the thin barrier that divides Tai ao from Tai po, the realm of Life from that of Death. Tane-te-waiora shall guide them, and lay down the Golden Path over which they shall fare on to the realm of the erst Dawn Maid, where the soul loses its earthly aspect and the *awe* alone remains, the purified and etherealized essence of the human soul.

For us to regret the passing of the fertile and mythopoetic mind of uncultured man, for us to raise our voices in the Tangi a Apakura, the most ancient of all dirges, as represented by the wailing of Hine-moana, the ceaseless moaning of the restless ocean.

Even so did the men of old compare a loving and faithful wife to the ever grieving ocean :—" *Wahine tangi haehae, he ngaru moana, e kore e mātāki.*" (The ocean waves and lacerating, mourning women know no rest.)

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